

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews 459

entries, life stories, and selections from memoirs — to give young people a voice in the text. These accounts emphasize the diversity of children's experiences in the United States. Mintz often uses these sources to highlight the ways race, gender, and class affected children's lives. African American children — first as slaves, then as a disenfranchised group — generally had shorter childhoods than their white contemporaries. Similarly, boys and girls were raised to fit specific gender roles, shaping how they saw themselves and their place in society. Most importantly for Mintz, parents' income levels and socio-economic status often determined their children's health and levels of education.

Mintz's account of these varied childhood experiences might leave readers wondering what exactly defines childhood. The author defines childhood as the period between infancy and 18 years of age, a definition that contradicts Mintz's evidence that childhood is continuously being redefined. Throughout *Huck's Raft* he demonstrates that factors such as the economy, religious beliefs, migration patterns, gender roles, and racism have given childhood diverse meanings. It seems inappropriate to impose rigid age boundaries on such a fluid concept, one that is more determined by a young person's dependency on adults, and by adult attitudes towards children, than by a specific age.

Still, Mintz offers a thorough review of his subject, buttressed by a diverse source base that far outweighs the shortcomings of his study. *Huck's Raft* joins Joseph Kett's *Rites of Passage* and Harvey Graff's *Conflicted Paths* as an engaging survey and enjoyable read that will be appreciated by both the scholar and the lay reader. While its approach to and definition of childhood will provide ample fodder for graduate seminars, *Huck's Raft* will offer undergraduates a comprehensive synthesis that demonstrates the ways social realities and cultural concepts have affected — and continue to affect — young people's lives. It is a welcome addition to a growing area of historical inquiry.

Katharine Rollwagen
University of Ottawa

MORRIS, R. J. — *Men, Women and Property in England, 1780–1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. 445.

Men, Women and Property in England, 1780–1870 offers a new and rich interpretation of the interrelationships between property and capital accumulation by family members, family and individual life cycles, and the economy and urban landscape of Leeds. In its focus on these themes, this impressive history echoes and builds on much of the early work in family history that examined family strategies and structures within an economic framework. It builds, too, on R. J. Morris's earlier work on the middle classes and the property cycle. This is an economic and social history of the Leeds middle classes that places the families of that city in the broader context of the nation, but is also

more than that. Morris seeks to pay serious attention to gender, entering into dialogue most explicitly with the arguments of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall in their classic *Family Fortunes* and with some other feminist scholars. He pays careful attention to material culture and to the law and some attention to religion and religious belief. This is a book that will be of interest to historians of gender, women, the family, material culture, cities, and the economy and to many more.

Morris makes four main interrelated arguments, though the book sparkles and surprises with many others throughout. First, the lives of the middle classes he describes were marked by insecurity as much as by the certitude or confidence in their morality and superiority to the aristocracy that Davidoff and Hall have captured. He insists that, despite their privilege relative to the working classes, middle-class families could not escape the uncertainty of illness, death, and potential bankruptcy. In detailed readings of family letters and account books as well as in analyses of broader patterns of investment, he demonstrates the range of gendered strategies deployed to minimize that insecurity. Secondly, he insists that a focus on the nuclear family of husband, wife, and children misses the significance of the much broader network of unmarried aunts, uncles, widows, and orphans that were part of families' economic and social networks and of the ways they spread risk in the face of uncertainty. Thirdly, Morris demonstrates the diverse workings of the middle-class property cycle. Here, detailing the stories of different Leeds families, he shows how young men began their family lives in debt as they sought to accumulate capital or other assets in a variety of ways, and how they sought to reach a stage at which they could live off their profits and, if necessary, provide for their widows and orphans. Of particular interest are his descriptions of the kinds of property and stock purchased, of the shift of investments from the local to the national to the international level over the nineteenth century, and of the severing from local knowledge this change entailed. Finally, he shows the ways urban landscapes were mapped and remapped in bursts of development that intersected with family life cycles and historical conjunctures.

Men, Women and Property draws on a very wide range of primary and secondary evidence. Most important are the rich collections of the papers of the Oates, Lupton, and Jowitt families. Morris uses these to zoom in to the micro level of the "world of Madeira and honey" (p. 1), furniture, family quarrels, and family dilemmas, deftly shaping narratives that explain what are often complicated family money matters and that make individual people key players in this economic family history. Equally significant in framing his arguments and in providing both individual and collective information about how men and women, widows and orphans figured in decisions about inheritance are wills and probate records, which he analysed for the years 1830 to 1834. These show that most men in Leeds bequeathed their property equally to all children and made careful provision for the possibility that their wives might become widows, usually by promising them income from a trust that could tie up family estates for years. They seemed less likely to trust their wives as executors than studies of earlier periods show. Morris supports his arguments about economic trends and family characteristics and choices with an overwhelming

number of graphs and tables. The maps showing how family members shaped particular neighbourhoods are particularly interesting, but fewer tables and more visuals of some of the main characters or of their homes and furnishings would have been appreciated.

Morris's insistence on the significance of property, of its centrality to questions of class and its different meaning for men and women is an important reminder that money matters at a time when questions of sexuality, identity, and culture are attracting so much more interest among historians. The best chapters are those that explore family dynamics at the local level — chapter 3 based on reading wills, chapter 4 on the property cycle, chapter 8 on “networks and places,” and especially chapter 6 entitled “Women and Things and Trusts.” His success at making the book engaging and convincing is uneven. The writing and the arguments range through superb to silly to simply confusing in places. There is a tension in the shifting of scales of observation; when he departs from Leeds to make broader claims about the English middle classes, one feels as if the book loses its focus. This is particularly the case of chapter 2, which looks very broadly at the English middle class, its values, its challenges, and the stories its members told about their own making, and of chapter 9, which is a broad economic history of the British middle class. Particularly startling was the Conclusion/Epilogue in which Morris delves in unnecessarily great detail into the issues raised in the 1868 Select Committee looking into changing married women's property rights. These very broad sections go beyond a contextualization of the Leeds middle class, confirming the desire, captured in the book's main title, to claim to speak generally about the English middle classes, rather than just those of Leeds. I think the book would have been more interesting and coherent had it remained more resolutely at the local scale.

As someone who studies widowhood, I was thrilled that widows figured prominently in this history and that Morris pays such close attention to men's desire to provide for their wives after their deaths. Yet, at times, he does not follow through on the implications of the gendered access to property that he so well describes. For instance, he found, as have other historians, that women's wills were different from men's. They were more likely to show “female preferences,” to bequeath things other than property, and to give to charities. They marked out a broader range of family, friends, and servants than did men's wills. Why “women were things people” (p. 247) is not explained as well as it might be, given the author's other data. Perhaps it is simply too obvious. Most women who wrote wills were widows. Most lived only on the income from a trust or the use-value of property. Many had little else to give. An interesting comparison would have been the testamentary practices of widows and widowers, but, while Morris considers marital status in discussing women, he seldom does so for men. His observations about the anxieties produced by sickness and death are mostly about men. What happened when wives died before their husbands is not given similar attention. Morris might also have drawn more fruitfully on the ideas of historians of masculinity to interpret men's decisions or their final wishes. These questions underline the ways this is, as the title suggests, a book about men and women rather than about the meanings of

gender. As I read and re-read the book, I found myself questioning some interpretations, frustrated at repetitions and a roughness that might have disappeared with more serious editing, but was most often impressed by the evidence and arguments. *Men, Women and Property* is an impressive and important book.

Bettina Bradbury
York University

RIEGER, Bernhard — *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. 319.

Using the tools of comparative analysis, this rich, multi-layered, meticulously researched, and carefully crafted monograph probes key questions about the role of technology in mass society, modernity, and nationalism and national identity. Focusing on the period between 1890 and 1945, Bernhard Rieger traces British and German experience, debate, and discourse pertaining to three technological realms: airplanes/airships, motion pictures, and large ocean-going passenger ships. At the most immediate level, Rieger explores the discourses surrounding these technologies on the part of users, the mass public, governments, media, and the companies and individuals involved in their development. Rieger finds that, on the whole, despite their widely publicized and debated risks and dangers and despite frequent undertones of ambivalence, the mass public in both countries remained supportive of these innovations and of technological innovation in general. Rieger finds little trace in this period of the more far-reaching distrust and malaise about technology that has become so prevalent today.

Rieger's overarching goal is to use these empirical studies as a foundation for comparative analysis of how technology was linked to ideas of modernity, nationalism, and national identity in Britain and Germany. He notes that both the German and British publics viewed technological innovations as tools of national development and symbols of national identity and international status. Yet these ideas took somewhat different forms in each country. Britons linked technology to a world view focused on preserving the nation's colonial empire and world position, whereas Germans linked technology to an ideology focused increasingly (after 1918) on a perception of needing to advance within a world order that unfairly penalized their nation. Rieger observes that these distinct world views embodied different conceptions of modernity: Britain's notion of modernity was conservative, "predicated on a desire for continuity" (p. 274). Germans, however, particularly during the Nazi regime, held a far more radical conception of modernity, aimed at altering the status quo and rooted in an anti-Enlightenment view of technological innovation "as the expression of a will to fight" (p. 280) rather than as a product of rational thought. Rieger considers how these diverging visions shaped particular technological discourses. For example, he shows that